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Introduction to "Sophistae"

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Abstract: Plato's "Apology of Socrates" is a masterpiece of the philosophical literature. The question remains as to how much it has been influenced by earlier works, e.g. of Gorgias of Leontinoi and Euripides. Nevertheless, comparative studies on Hippolytus' defense in Euripides' tragedy of the same name, on Gorgias' "Defense of Palamedes" and on Plato's "Apology" do not exist. The short paper gives an introduction into the status quaestionis.

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Introduction

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The contribution of Maria Cecília de Miranda Nogueira Coelho starts with the observation that comparative studies on Hippolytus' defense in Euripides' tragedy of the same name, on Gorgias' *Defense of Palamedes*, and on Plato's *Defense of Socrates (Apology)* do not exist. The best-known comparative studies on Gorgias' and Plato's texts were written by Guido Calogero (1957) and James Coulter (1964). Both arrive, however, at different conclusions: For Calogero, Gorgias is a source for the Socratic doctrine *nemo sua sponte peccat*; Coulter understands Plato's *Apology* as an anti-Palamedes. The author thinks that the prerequisites of both texts can be understood more clearly if one uses the speech for the defense of Hippolytus as a *tertium comparationis*, because the protagonist of this text is a mythical figure like Palamedes and he is wrongly accused and punished like Socrates. The author tries to show similarities between the texts by discussing the defense of Hippolytus; this discussion rests on results of the author's doctoral thesis and some additional studies on this topic. Euripides' *Hippolytus* contains an ethical position which arises from a skeptical epistemological position regarding the possibility of recognizing reality. This position is connected with Phaedra's *akrasia* (see vv. 373-430). In verses 380/1, she says that although we know what is good, we do not do it. That is why many interpreters see an intellectual closeness between Euripides and Socrates and understand Euripides' text as a source for the Socratic doctrine that nobody errs voluntarily (*Prot.* 352d). The use of the word *glôssa* (tongue) in v. 991 reminds us of the beginning of Plato's *Apology*; the reference to Hippolytus' superiority over all other people (v. 1100), as well as the fact that he comes back to the stage – so to speak – as a dead man (v. 1365), shows strong similarities between Hippolytus, Palamedes, and Socrates. Euripides seems to defend the position (cf. e. g. v. 1137) that one can rely on the logos even if the logos is unsatisfactory, as long as one remembers the limits of words and does not think that language always reveals the truth. This position is similar to one in the *Defense of Palamedes*, when Palamedes asks the jury to judge his case with more time, and to one at the end of Plato's *Apology* (38c).

Since Heinrich Gomperz (1912) pointed to the narrow textual proximity of Gorgias' *Defense of Palamedes* and Plato's *Defense of Socrates (Apology)*, there has been a discussion about the authenticity of the *Defense of Palamedes* and the temporal priority of Gorgias' text. This discussion was continued by Guido Calogero (1957) and James Coulter (1964): While Coulter perceives Plato's *Defense of Socrates* as an anti-Palamedes or anti-Gorgias, Calogero understands the *Defense of Palamedes* as an early form of the Socratic principle *nemo sua sponte peccat*. Coulter puts forward the thesis that Plato's

Apology literally reshaped the historical lawsuit and the historical Socrates for the purpose of criticizing Gorgias. This thesis has met with objections because none of the contemporary sources questions the historical basis of Plato's *Apology*. The contribution of Alonso Tordesillas makes some remarks on the structure and the topics of the two defense speeches. Palamedes' talk has a classical composition and follows the structure of contemporary defense speeches, and Socrates' defense follows the same rules: In both texts, the *diégêsis* is missing – contrary to classical rules. The *pistis* of Plato's *Apology* has the same structure as the text of the *Palamedes*. The topic of *doxa*, *alêtheia*, and *eikos* is used in both texts so that in *Apol.* 41b1, Socrates mentions that he meets Ajax and Palamedes in Hades, and he also wants to compare his adventures with those of Palamedes (41b2-7). The contributor thinks that the term *antiparaballonti* (cf. *Hip. Min.* 369c6) points to the competition between the positions represented in the *Palamedes* and in Plato's *Apology*. However, he agrees with Coulter in saying that the general sense of this allusion is "je poserais ma vie et ma mort à celles de ces deux hommes comme une refutation et un défi quant à la valeur de ma position philosophique par rapport à celle qui fonde la *Défense de Palamède*" (XXX, see Coulter, 297: Xenoph. *Apol.* 26 = I C 152 SSR). The *erotêsis* which is connected with this indicates an authentic core of the dialogue between Socrates and Meletos.

Discussion

Odile van der Vaeren draws attention to the following fact. We have to distinguish between two different charges, the old one (19b-c) and the new one (24b-c). The old runs as follows: "Socrates does wrong and is too concerned with inquiring about what's in the heavens and below the earth and to make the weaker argument appear to be the stronger and to teach these same things to others' – something like this" (transl. Brickhouse & Smith). The originality in replying to the old charge consists in the manner of leading the *erotêsis*. Socrates himself gives to the public audience the initiative of asking questions: "One of you, perhaps might respond: 'So what's the matter with you, Socrates? Where did these accusations come from? For surely if you weren't engaged in something unusual but were only doing something different from most people, these rumors and talk about you wouldn't have gotten started. So tell us what it is, so that we don't reach a hasty judgment about you'" (20c4-d1, transl. Brickhouse & Smith). In the reply, Socrates gives a new twist to the juridical process of questioning and answering because he himself replies to charges for which nobody in the public stands up. But why does Socrates not introduce witnesses against the old charge? *One* obvious answer may be that his friend from youth, Chairephon, is dead. To make good for this, he introduces "a witness" (20e7) whose authority is trustworthy for the Athenians: the oracle of Delphi. Evidently someone who acts on the authority of Apollon can do no wrong. In this way, Socrates seems to meet the objection that he does not introduce witnesses against the old charge.

Unfortunately, Simon Slings' critique of Coulter is mentioned neither by Tordesillas nor Coelho: "Most probably Plato knew Gorgias' epideictic speech, but I do not think that *any* of the similarities which Coulter (partly in the wake of others) finds between that work and the Platonic *Apology* is significant. In the sentence just quoted (*bios ou biôtos pisteôs esterômenôî*), Palamedes argues that if he had been a traitor to the Greeks, his life would have been ruined: he could neither take refuge among the Greeks nor

among the barbarians for he would have been trusted nowhere ‘and life is intolerable (*ou biôtos*) when one is deprived of (other men’s) confidence’.”¹ This is something other than *ho de anexetastos bios ou biôtos anthrôpoi* (*Apol.* 38a5-6). Nevertheless, Tordesillas’ interpretation of *antiparaballonti* (*Apol.* 41b3-4) repeats Coulter’s interpretation: “I set my life, and my death (*pathê*), and what they both mean, as a direct challenge to (*antibaraballonti*), and refutation of, the validity of the philosophical position which is at the basis of Palamedes’ defense of his life.”² As Richard Hunter remarks: “In fact, however, the two texts are very different in this particular: in *Palamedes* 22-27 the hero addresses a series of questions to his accuser, but these neither expect nor receive any answer – this is simply a vivid use of second-person address, rather than the more usual third-person style in which one’s opponent is treated: in the *Apology*, however, Socrates really does cross-examine Meletos *more suo* and at some length.”³ This confirms Tordesillas’ view that the dialogue between Socrates and Meletos has an authentic core.

We may then conclude: The author of the *Apology* – Plato – is a *poeta doctus* and seems to remember – maybe even by heart – Gorgias’ *Apology of Palamedes* (and perhaps also Euripides’ *Hippolytos*, although the evidence in the latter case is rather weak).⁴ But he uses Gorgias’ language with quite another intention. This he does by sharpening the meaning of expressions already used by Gorgias, such as *alêtheia* and *doxa*. This means not that the *Apology* is an anti-Palamedes. The *Apology* is, rather, an example of what we may call with Auguste Diès “la transposition platonicienne” of Gorgias-style rhetoric into a rhetoric of truthfulness: *rhêtoros de [aretê] talêthê legein* (*Apol.* 18a5-6).

¹ Slings (1994), 374.

² Coulter (1979), 66.

³ Hunter (2011), 112 n. 9.

⁴ Calogero (1957), 15: “[Socrates] must also have clearly remembered Gorgias’ *Apology of Palamedes* when he pronounced before his judges his own apology”.